

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET FOR REGULAR MEETING OF APRIL 19, 2002

Prepared on April 11, 2002

ITEM: 15

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF WATER-QUALITY ISSUES IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

SUMMARY

The Regional Board has not held a meeting in Santa Barbara County in several years. In developing a water-quality issues report for the county, we invited a variety of local governmental agencies, environmental groups, and regulated parties with water-quality interests or projects relevant to Santa Barbara County to provide information pertaining to their missions and current water-quality projects. This supplemental item provides additional information pertaining to various water quality issues and the participating entities in Santa Barbara County.

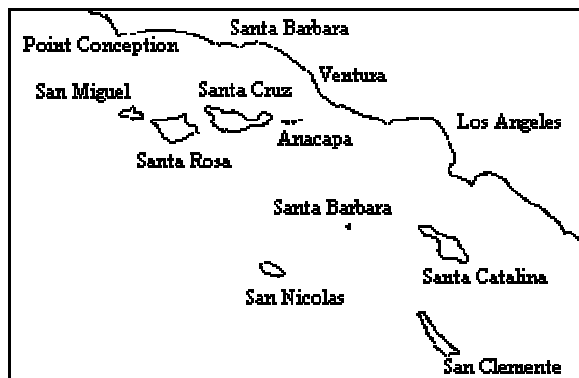
WATERSHED BRANCH

Channel Islands National Park, Santa Rosa Island

Channel Islands National Park is located off the Ventura and Santa Barbara County coastline. The park is comprised of Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara Islands. Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel Islands are located within Santa Barbara County and the Central Coast Region; Anacapa (Ventura County) and Santa Barbara Islands (Los Angeles County) are located in the Los Angeles Region. The National Park Service owns 24 percent of Santa Cruz Island with the Nature Conservancy owning the remainder.

The park consists of 249,354 acres, half of which are under the ocean. Over 2,000 species of plants and animals can be found within the park, however only four mammals are endemic to the islands. One hundred and forty-five of these species are

unique to the islands and found nowhere else in the world. Marine life ranges from microscopic plankton to the endangered blue whale, the largest animal on earth. Archeological and cultural resources span a period of more than 10,000 years.

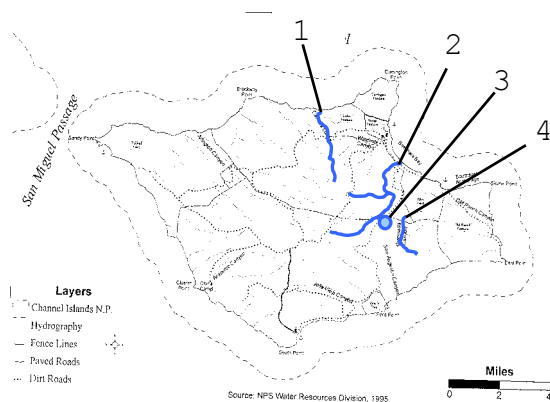


Channel Islands (Courtesy National Park Service)

Water Quality Issues: During a visit to Santa Rosa Island in 1991, Regional Board staff observed improper grazing and road-management practices, resulting in severe erosional, bacterial, and sedimentation impacts to island creeks in violation of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Improper land-use activities included cattle overgrazing, animal wastes discharged directly to the creeks, and poor road construction and maintenance. The observed water-quality impacts occurred in Canada Lobos, Quemada Canyon, Clapp Springs, and Water Canyon Creeks. Staff from the Regional Board and National Park Service discussed options for improving land use practices, however by 1995, no improvements were observed on the island. The Regional Board directed staff to draft a Cleanup and Abatement

Order addressing water-quality impacts and requiring improvements in grazing and road management practices on Santa Rosa Island.

In August 1995, Cleanup or Abatement Order No. 95-064 (CAO) was issued to the National Park Service. The CAO required the Park Service to abate land-use practices that degraded riparian habitat, water quality, and induced sediment transport into surface waters. Under the terms of the CAO, the Park Service was also required to report on land-use improvement implementation and monitor stream quality.



Santa Rosa Island (Courtesy of Channel Islands National Park) with

- 1) Canada Lobos Creek,
- 2) Water Canyon Creek,
- 3) Clapp Springs, and
- 4) Quemada Canyon Creek.

The Park Service removed cattle from Santa Rosa Island in 1998. Vegetation throughout the island and particularly in riparian areas has shown a dramatic recovery. Non-indigenous elk and deer will also be removed from the island, in a phased removal negotiated with the former landowners, further reducing grazing impacts. Additional water quality restoration activities have been completed or are ongoing, including, improving a former roadway that was causing significant erosion and sedimentation.

The Park Service is currently revising its General Management Plan, and is working with Regional Board staff to identify water quality goals for the islands and management practices that will help achieve these goals. Individual Park Service

mitigation efforts are described in more detail in the following paragraphs:

Vegetation Improvement: Since cattle removal in September of 1998, dramatic improvements in vegetation have occurred island-wide. While overall watershed vegetation conditions have improved, riparian vegetation conditions show the greatest improvement. Photo-documentation monitoring by the Park Service indicates several dramatic examples of re-vegetation throughout riparian and non-riparian areas. In all drainages where there is perennial flow, riparian dependent species such as willow, willow baccharis, cattail, sedges, and carex continue to become established.

Negotiated Settlement: In 1997, the Park Service approved a management plan that included goals to improve water quality and conserve rare plant species on Santa Rosa Island. The National Parks and Conservation Association and Vail & Vickers (former landowners) both challenged this management plan and its implementation in two lawsuits against the Park Service. A negotiated settlement between these parties required that cattle be removed from the island by the end of 1998 and deer and elk by 2011. To ensure that deer and elk grazing are not impacting federally listed endangered plant species, the Park Service conducts extensive monitoring.

Restoration Activities: Smith Highway, a segment of highly degraded road just outside of the main ranch complex on Santa Rosa Island, has been restored. This repair project abated significant erosion from three highly incised gullies formed by storm water runoff from the roads. Other erosion abatement work is scheduled this year with the implementation of the Island oak restoration project. This re-vegetation project will decrease erosion in a disturbed area impacted by past livestock grazing. Significant erosion abatement will be achieved through completion of these projects.

General Management Plan: – The Park Service is currently revising the general management plan (GMP) for the park. The GMP address issues such as wilderness suitability, vehicle use, and road management. Regional Board staff will continue to participate in the GMP evaluation to help

identify water quality goals for Channel Islands National Park.

Future: Park Service staff express willingness to work with Regional Board Staff to complete mitigation efforts necessary to rescind the CAO. Under a nationwide National Park Service initiative called the Natural Resource Challenge, the park has received augmented funding this year to compile information on the post-grazing recovery on Santa Rosa Island. A major portion of this project will document the recovery of riparian areas and water quality that were impacted by past livestock grazing.

The National Park Service has made significant strides towards completing the intended goals of the CAO by eliminating livestock grazing from Santa Rosa Island. In light of the elimination of livestock grazing and recovery of the vegetation, Regional Board Staff will re-evaluate the monitoring program as described in the CAO, as it was largely directed toward the grazing practices on the island. The modified monitoring plan will focus on continued improvement in erosion and sediment control as this relates to road maintenance practices and impacts associated to the remaining elk and deer populations.

Regional Board staff will review a summary report covering mitigation efforts and monitoring data for Santa Rosa Island. Regional Board staff will analyze and compare recent water quality data with data collected immediately after issuance of the CAO to measure compliance. Evaluation of this data will determine appropriateness of rescinding the CAO. Regional Board staff will continue to work with the Park Service to complete the remaining requirements of the CAO.

For more information about the Channel Islands National Park, visit their website at <http://www.nps.gov/chis/homepage.htm>

Heal The Ocean

Heal the Ocean provided a recent newsletter which is included as Attachment 1.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Heal the Ocean

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